

Blessed Sacrament CAC
August 14, 2006
DRAFT Notes

CAC Members Present: Clara Garcia, Fernando Mercedes, Damaris Pimentel, Michael Reiskind, Jennifer Spencer, Carmen Velazquez, Sylvia Villar, BRA: Ines Soto, Jonathan Greeley, Heather Campisano, Lance Campbell; Office of Rep. Sanchez: Andrea Martinez,

Welcome: Ines Soto (BRA) welcomed the group and introduced the agenda.

BCDC: Jennifer Spencer (CAC) provided feedback from the Boston Civic Design Commission meeting. Overall, BCDC liked the project. They had concerns with the roofline, pedestrian access, the materials of the L-shaped building, and the size of the green core. They would like the developer to use pictures to illustrate a view down Centre Street of the project to see how it fits into the community. The community concerns focused on the mixed-use buildings, the surrounding streets, parking and the green core, and trash pickup. The projects traffic pattern was vaguely explained to BCDC.

Clara Garcia (CAC) felt that the commission shared some of the CAC's concerns, but was impressed overall. She thought there was some difficulty because of a focus on the Church; other buildings contribute to density and massing issues. Carmen Velasquez (CAC) agreed.

Jennifer (CAC) added that they were impressed to see a Church project incorporate affordable housing.

Ines moved the conversation to scheduling and zoning. She reminded the group that the Boston Landmarks Commission would be meeting on August 22nd in the BRA Board Room. The exact time for the presentation was unknown and would be sent to the CAC when it was available.

Carmen (CAC) asked if this was a public meeting and Ines (BRA) replied that it was.

Lance Campbell (BRA) informed the CAC that the BRA pulled the development team in to meet with the BRA the previous week. The BRA asked the developers to make the same presentation to BLC as they had to BCDC to ensure consistency. The schedule was also discussed to ensure that the CAC would get a chance to cover everything. It also included a discussion of BCDC feedback and asked the development team for a zoning analysis.

Jennifer (CAC) asked why there was a need for a zoning analysis.

Ines (BRA) added that it was important for the BCDC and BLC presentations remain the same so they are both reacting to the same project. Additionally, it is important for the CAC to get new information first, not before anyone else. It is also important to look at the overall schedule. She has spoken with Kevin Leary, the chair of the JPNC zoning committee. The BRA will bring the zoning expert Rick Shaklik, who is on vacation, to address zoning issues. Additionally, at the next meeting the JPND will explain the logic behind their map amendment and present a comprehensive picture of this development in relation to Centre Street. She also explained that

the schedule remains ambitious, but it was still a pushback to the developer. The JPNC will also need to have a public meeting on the zoning change.

Lance (BRA) stated that he would be going before the BRA Board for permission to bring the project to the zoning commission on September 19th.

Jennifer (CAC) asked for a zoning analysis explanation. Lance (BRA) replied that a map amendment would change the use to Multifamily Residential (MFR) and Neighborhood Shopping (NS). The dimensional table is another piece. The analysis will look at issues such as setbacks and height, so it would indicate if there are too many variances for a map amendment to make sense.

Clara (CAC) asked for clarification.

Carmen (CAC) felt that it seemed backwards to discuss zoning later in the process. Right now, as zoned, the site could only hold 25 single-family homes.

Lance (BRA) stated that zoning is not a planning tool. The project needs to be examined first, approve it, and then look at zoning.

Clara (CAC) felt that PNF is incomplete without the analysis.

Ines (BRA) spoke about ways to change zoning.

Lance (BRA) stated that the developer came in with a proposal for 118 units of housing that would require a zoning change. The options are as follows 1.) Planned Development Area (PDA) but they do not exist in JP; 2.) 121A- a MA law, but there a number of restrictions and the project has to qualify; 3.) Map Amendment; 4.) Board of Appeal and getting variances to deal with each zoning violation. Lance added that the map amendment is a request to the zoning committee to change the zoning.

Ines (BRA) stated that one reason for this approach is allow for the joint retail and residential development on Centre Street. No dimensional tables will change. Lance (BRA) added that only changes rarely, and will not be happening in this case.

Jennifer (CAC) asked if it was the job of the CAC to support the amendment or not? Ines (BRA) replied that it is the CAC and JPNC's job to review proposed zoning and make recommendation.

Carmen (CAC) asked if the map amendment was spot zoning. Lance (BRA) replied that it was not. Michael Reiskind (CAC) added that it is not really spot zoning because it is such a larger parcel.

Lance (BRA) stated that in 1993, when JP was re-zoned, the Church was left alone as no one anticipated any future change to the site's use. Carmen (CAC) still felt it was spot zoning.

Ines (BRA) stated that there has to be community benefits involved. She suggested bringing in Rick Shaklik, BRA Director of Zoning to talk about what the BRA and Zoning Commission look for.

Lance (BRA) stated that the developer has to go through a long process and speak with a number of parties to get the zoning change. Spot zoning happens quickly. This is an advertised and public process with a tremendous amount of discussion. The developer will have to justify their proposal.

Jennifer (CAC) asked if there were no zoning change, would there be a project? Michael (CAC) stated that all projects face this issue. The real issue is if the project is good for the neighborhood. If it is, then help the zoning catch up. In 1993, there was a debate on whether to use zoning as a planning tool or to reflect the neighborhood.

Jennifer (CAC) felt the group was talking around issues. Maybe each person should state their feelings individually.

Fernando Mercedes (CAC) asked Jennifer what she was looking for. Jennifer (CAC) replied that she was looking for a conclusion. Ines (BRA) stated that we are here to be informative.

Damaris Pimentel (CAC) stated that she likes the information she has received so far. What she does not see is the CAC working on zoning. It is not our decision, so we should get the information and move along. Unless the CAC approved the project, it doesn't matter.

Ines (BRA) pointed out that the zoning discussion needs to occur parallel to the project review process, not at the end of the process. Heather Campisano (BRA) stated that you could not move forward with a project unless there is an agreement on a zoning change.

Damaris (CAC) asked if the CAC supports the project, how would they not support the zoning change? The time should be spent on the project, not the zoning change. The map amendment is only extending the sub districts into the project they are already in the neighborhood.

Lance (BRA) stated that the developers still needed to complete a zoning analysis.

Damaris (CAC) stated that was a BRA issue. The CAC should focus on the project, not the zoning.

Clara (BRA) would have thought the analysis part of the submission to the BRA. If we took Damaris' advice and focused on the project, zoning would be covered.

Heather (BRA) stated that the analysis is forcing the developer to double check and ensure their original analysis was correct. It makes sure the map amendment covers the project and if the BRA does not get the info it needs, the project will not move forward.

Ines (BRA) added that the map amendment permanently changes the zoning for JP on this site, so for the sake of the public the CAC still needs to understand the issues. Ines asked Michael if he wanted to weigh in as a member of the JPNC.

Clara (CAC) felt confused, is it the map or the neighborhood? Damaris (BRA) replied that it was only this site.

Jennifer (CAC) mentioned that even with NS zoning on the front of the site, any type of chain could be put into the ground floor retail.

Carmen (CAC) felt it was a matter of density. Single-family zoning is less than MFR, so density remains an issue for the SNA neighborhood.

Ines (BRA) stated that this is a specific project, but it permanently changes the zoning map for JP. The CAC also needs to schedule this process.

Jennifer (CAC) asked if the CAC should go with Damaris' idea. Damaris (CAC) reiterated that she wanted to hear more details about the project.

Ines (BRA) replied that after the 8/22 Landmarks Commission meeting the developers would be able to present their changes to the CAC. Heather (BRA) added that post BLC, this should happen.

Jennifer (CAC) asked what informs what? She thought the group would come to conclusions.

Fernando (CAC) felt that it would be impossible to have some conclusions until further in the project. Damaris (CAC) stated that they could still look at the project.

Heather (CAC) wanted to make sure the CAC was comfortable with the mechanism.

Michael (CAC) felt reluctance to discuss the issues, and he was not sure why. Everything is related and that is why the BRA has urged the group to look at zoning. Everyone is also discussing whether this is appropriate for the neighborhood.

Lance (BRA) suggested looking at NS, asking what the implications are for the project, and if it is realistic. How will it work and do we want this? For example, the height, what does 45 feet mean?

Ines (BRA) asked the group what they wanted to do next.

Jennifer (BRA) stated that at some point, the group would need a product. How does the group feel? We need to show progress. For example, the developer needs to explain why they are going after a map amendment. Are they looking to avoid variance work?

Carmen (CAC) felt that a map amendment is quicker and easier. If the developer has to go to Board of Appeal, the abutters can go to court. Depending on the Cheverus use, they might have to go to court regardless.

Jennifer (CAC) felt that the map amendment could be used to avoid the community.

Carmen (CAC) stated that the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association is part of the community as well.

Michael (CAC) looked at a map of the project. He then discussed the changes to the zoning map and asked is MFR was appropriate over the entire site. Personally, he felt it could be made to fit (referring to mixed-use building). NS allows for multi-family development. He suggested that the site was comprised of 3 parcels.

Carmen (CAC) stated that the developer views it as a campus.

Michael (CAC) felt that NS of Local Convenience (LC) was fine to him on the front of the site. In back, does MFR seem appropriate? Maybe not in relation to Sunnyside and Westerly. The convent, the Compass school, and the condos seem to fit into the neighborhood. Along Creighton, MFR seems appropriate. The edges in the rear might want something else.

Carmen (CAC) asked what happens to the mixed-use building?

Michael (CAC) replied that it was in two zoning areas and he was not sure if that worked.

Damaris (CAC) stated that the developer might have a new plan after BCDC and BLC.

Carmen (CAC) did not have an issue with adding businesses on Centre Street. She disliked the height and the design of the mixed-use building. She would have left the rectory alone as a way to make the corner less massive. There will be more residents on the site than in the surrounding area. This causes her density concerns.

Jennifer (CAC) asked what would work instead of MFR.

Carmen (CAC) asked what is MFR specifically. Lance (CAC) replied that it allowed for housing of 3 or more units.

Michael (CAC) suggested looking at FAR numbers for the site. Jennifer (CAC) stated that the FAR is 1. The FAR for a Single-Family 3,000 is .6.

Michael (CAC) stated that the FAR on Mark Street is very high, so a block west of the project is much more dense.

Ines (BRA) suggested possible forming a sub-committee to do this, as this is a very difficult topic to cover. She suggested emailing the BRA specific zoning questions.

Jennifer (CAC) asked how to format a comment letter to Lance if the process is not complete when the comment period ends?

Ines (BRA) suggested making comments on that point and suggesting what you see as the ultimate goals of the project. Lance (BRA) agreed.

Ines (BRA) mentioned the CAC letter, to be written as a group. It will need to include the thoughts and feelings of the CAC.

Damaris (CAC) felt one letter should come from the group.

Ines (BRA)) suggested a meeting date of 8/23 to meet with the developers following their BLC presentation.

Lance (BRA) stated that if anyone had any zoning questions, they should feel free to address them with BRA staff. Ines (BRA) stated that she would invite Kevin Leary to the 8/23 meeting.

Damaris (CAC) asked that as many CAC members as possible attend the Landmarks Hearing.

Ines (BRA) introduced a handout with definitions that are commonly used zoning terms. Also, Rick Ahlberg asked that this following letter be handed out to the CAC members. It was written to the BRA and shared with Michael Cannizzo.

Meeting Adjourned.